

Human Resources Bulletin 99-14

Federal Employees Health Benefits Program

Open Season

The 1999 Federal Employees health Benefits (FEHB) open season will be held from November 8 through December 13, 1999.

At a later date all 2000 FEHB Guides and all health plan brochures will be available on the web at www.opm.gov/insure. The Guides and brochures will be available in PDF format for downloading and printing, as well as a text version suitable for the visually impaired. In addition, the web site will contain a version of the FEHB Guide designed specifically for the electronic environment. It will contain links from the plans' names to the plans' brochures in both PDF and text formats. It will also contain links from the FEHB Guides and the brochures to plan web sites for additional information about the plans, as well as links to other related web sites. The web site will also offer information about the Patient's Bill of Rights.

More information will be provided when the information is available on the web.

Plan to Control Health Premiums for Federal Employees and Retirees Announced with Release of Premium Increase for 2000

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has released Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan premium rates for 2000. Consistent with increases being experienced by other large employers, the FEHBP includes an average 9.3 percent increase. The new rates are on the web at www.opm.gov. When the web page opens, look on the right side of the page under "What's Hot." Click on the entry for 2000 FEHB Premium Rates.

OPM has also announced new initiatives to hold the line on premium increases in the Federal Employees Health Benefits program. On average, an FEHBP member with self-only coverage will pay \$33.04 every two weeks - \$2.94 more than in 1999. A member with family coverage will pay \$71.76, or \$7.09 more than last year.

To control future increases and improve the program, OPM has announced its intention to:

- raise the quality and cost effectiveness of health plans by raising the standards for participation in FEHBP, and
- achieve efficiencies and economies of scale by contracting directly for selected benefits.

OPM expects to submit legislative proposals early in the new year.

Health care costs continue to increase, especially for prescription drugs. Absent aggressive steps by OPM, the overall increases would have been even higher. To counteract the high cost of prescription drugs, members will find that many plans have changed their prescription benefit to encourage the use of mail-order drug purchases and the purchase of generic drugs. In addition, most participants will pay a minimum \$10 co-payment for all visits to a primary care doctor.

OPM strongly encourages FEHBP members to look beyond a plan's premium. Members should review a plan's benefits, paying particular attention to prescription drugs, co-payments and coinsurance. This year, the FEHBP open season guides have even greater comparison information about benefits and out-of-pocket costs. This year members can compare health plans by zip code using an interactive web tool.

Forty-three health plans have notified OPM that they are leaving the program in 2000. Less than 1% of FEHBP members are covered by these plans and must select a new health plan because of the withdrawals. Health plans that leave the program must tell each of their members that they need to select a new plan during the open season.

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